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# THE OUTLOOK FOR AMERICAN ORIENTAL STUDIES

THE PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS FOR 1918\*

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SEVENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO, in March, 1843, the American Oriental Society was incorporated, by the laws of the State of Massachusetts. Many of us who are present today remember the celebration of the semi-centennial of the Society in Boston, in 1893. The interval of twenty-five years seems to us a short one, though it has witnessed some important changes, and a steady advance in the most of the activities represented by our organization. There is an obvious fitness in the accidental circumstance that whereas the completion of fifty years of work was commemorated in Boston, where the Society was founded, the present celebration takes place in New Haven, which in former years shared with Boston the honor of being the chief place of meeting, and now may justly claim to be the true center, since it is the home of the Society's library and the place where its Journal is printed.

I shall not dwell upon past history, though the temptation to do so is strong at this time, in the city which was the home of Salisbury and Whitney and others whom the world of scholars will always delight to honor. Other speakers will call them to mind in the course of our meeting. It has seemed to me suitable, on this anniversary, to give the President's address a more general character than usual. Instead of choosing some subject of which I have special expert knowledge, I shall rehearse very briefly things which you all know; hoping as I do so that the occasion and the interest of the matters to be considered may combine to make the recital stimulating. I cannot claim to speak for the Society, even in all the cases where I employ the first person plural. I am merely expressing my own opinions. The present time is in many ways a critical one for oriental

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studies in this country, and it may be well for us to consider in a general way the ground of their importance here and now, and the outlook for their development in the near future. It requires no special gift of prophecy to foresee that the next decade is likely to be a very important one in the history of this Society and the work which it represents.

I recently read in a well known educational journal the prediction that after the war our colleges and universities will give less time than at present to such studies as ancient languages, literature, and history, replacing them by disciplines of greater practical value. From many quarters we have heard something similar. It is inevitable that at such a time as this, when the fate of nations, our own included, is seen to rest immediately on material equipment and effectiveness, the desire should be strong in all of us to simplify and strengthen the machinery which is turning out the human product on which we have especially to rely. More than this, we have been made to see, more or less clearly, our inability, as a nation, to meet fully the demand of the present crisis. 'Show us men who can do things!' is the cry in every part of the land; and all our educational institutions are faced with the question whether they have done their best to turn out such men. Confession of shortcoming is general and sincere, and every thought is turned, of necessity, to the resources and activities which are directly available in this time of need. 'Let us give our time and strength, more than ever before, to those lines of training and investigation which will prepare men for active public service. As for cultural studies, which are many, let us keep those which lie nearest, and drop those which are remote from present-day interests.' It is no wonder that this cry should be raised, and should seem entirely justified. But there is a wide difference between an emergency measure and a settled policy, and it is not likely that the humanities are in serious danger, even in this country and by reason of the war.

And what is 'public service'? The phrase is one which has been much misused, to the extent of contrasting the calling understood by the crowd with the pursuit of studies not obviously and immediately practical. In a former paper read before this Society I referred to the hope expressed by an officer of the Carnegie Institution that classical and oriental studies

might some day be raised to the level of anthropology and similar sciences. At a Chamber of Commerce dinner (if I remember rightly) held in New Haven some years ago, a paper was read in which the relation of Yale University to the city was considered at length. The paper was afterward printed, and I read it. Its author undertook to answer the question, Wherein lies the glory of such a city as this? He proceeded to show, with abundant illustration, that the glory and pride of a city lies in its broad and well-made streets, its good sidewalks, its public buildings, its shade-trees, and its water-front. And since it was capable of demonstration that Yale had never taken any important part in beautifying the streets or the water-front, he drew the conclusion that the University had on the whole done the city more harm than good. The idea that the pride and glory of a city might to some degree rest in its great men plainly never had occurred to him—any more than it had to the officer of the Carnegie Institution.

On another occasion a patriotic native of this city, nettled by hearing eulogies of William D. Whitney, whom he had known as a scholar of wide reputation—celebrated perhaps especially in foreign lands—asked somewhat indignantly what Professor Whitney had ever done for New Haven. The question was asked in the hearing of the late Professor Lounsbury, whose reply, if correctly reported, illustrates both his sound common sense and his broad outlook on the English language: 'Whitney? Do for New Haven? Gosh, he lived in it!'

The needs of cities and countries, even in a time of bitter struggle, are more varied than can be seen in any hasty survey. More than this, it is just where and when the feeling is strongest that man shall live by bread alone that the saving influence of great ideas must not be forgotten. The time when all eyes are fixed on the soil, the forces of nature, and mechanical contrivances, is the time to take thought for what is really best and most important in human achievement, and to assist in providing the only corrective of national near-sightedness by opening windows into distant lands and the remote past, so that men may be taught by history and inspired by great literature. The old world has stored up the fruit of its vast experience, and the new world needs it all; no multitude of scholars, nor succession of years, will ever suffice to exhaust the supply.

We are not concerned to plead the cause of the Orient; the Orient can and will take care of itself. The Western world could never cut loose from its older and wiser sister, even if it would. One can imagine a half-smile on the face of the Sphinx at the suggestion, or the sapient anecdotes which Kalila and Dimna would tell to each other, illustrating the folly of those who nourish the limbs and muscles at the expense of the vital organs. Even this busy land of ours, with all its exaggeration of material values, knows that it has some need of Egypt and China, of Babylonia and India and Palestine, for other reasons than recreation and commerce. Every age listens gladly to the appeal of the East when it hears it. But it is the call of the West, rather than of the East, to which we are just now listening. The question, what is most salutary for our own country, is being asked and answered, not in a new tone, but with a new vehemence; and there is therefore good reason for emphasizing, on such an occasion as this, the present importance of liberal studies in general and our own special group of studies in particular.

Peoples, like individuals, differ from one another in mental grasp, moral balance, and spiritual power. No one of these possessions is gained without long effort, or maintained without constant contribution from every available source. The wide distance between the backward nation and the highly civilized nation is not simply a matter of locomotives and telephones and shop management. It is the difference in knowledge of human life in all its dimensions. The crisis in which we now stand can only make these facts clearer, when once they are apprehended. Any discipline that can give a broader view of the world and its progress, awaken and promote human sympathy of an all-inclusive reach, and contribute to a better understanding among diverse peoples, is called for now. Every impulse in this direction can have its effect in this present age as never before, now that modern inventions and enterprise have so far removed the barriers of time and space.

The study of language is humanizing, as everyone knows. The old Roman poet Ennius was wont to say that he had three hearts, because he was master of three languages. The one was Latin, in which he wrote and lived his life as a cultivated Roman citizen; another was his native dialect Oscan, with all its

associations and attachments; the third was Greek. What this third 'heart' meant to him we can judge in some measure from our reading of Cicero and other Roman writers. It was the heart of the great Hellenic world, with all the history and the treasures of literature which eventually exerted such a profound influence on the Roman civilization. Ennius had been given a look into the past, and into the thought of men of another race, and knew that his soul was changed as a result. Greek was to him and to the scholars and statesmen of his nation not a language to be used in intercourse with Greeks, or in visiting Athens, but the means of access to a mighty world that was gone.

It is true in general that there is more of the civilizing, broadening power in the study of the ancient language or history than of the modern, for the greater vista of time is an important added factor. There are few educating influences more potent than a genuine glimpse of great antiquity; the very thought has in it something ennobling. This is one reason, among others, why the place of the ancient classics in the college curriculum can never be filled by modern language and literature. The very remoteness of the Graeco-Roman world gives a peculiar value to the contact with it; and the same is true, in even greater degree, of our ancient Eastern disciplines. There is also something disinterested in the pursuit of them which contributes to the idea of *magnanimitas* of which every student becomes more or less conscious. At the other end of the linguistic scale, so far as civilizing value is concerned, stand those modern languages the study of which is labeled: 'mainly for commercial purposes.' What is said of language applies to literature and history as well, for like reasons.

The oriental studies which we are pursuing have never been more needed in the Occident than they are today. They stand in high degree for the cultivation of the imagination, and for the comprehending of many far-off civilizations. There is inevitably gained from them a wider horizon and some appreciation of points of view vastly different from our own. Even a glance at the titles of the papers included in the program of this meeting will give some idea of the breadth of interest covered by the work of our Society; and whoever has studied the history of such investigations as these knows how certain is the practical

benefit from them, in any age of the world, even when they are pursued by the most typical specimen of the 'professor' as he is pictured in the comic journals.

One of my colleagues in another university, not an orientalist but one whose work is in the field of ancient history, said to me recently that he felt keenly the remoteness of his habitual employment from the needs of the present crisis, and the insufficiency of the contribution he was making to the common effort of our people in their great struggle. The same feeling has come to many, perhaps all of us during the past year, and every man must answer for himself the question of his own most valuable effort. One who does not happen to have in hand, nor within immediate reach, an undertaking of high importance may well turn aside for the time being to take up some one of the many emergency tasks which are waiting.

But there is another side to consider. The expert in our field is needed at his post, and perhaps as never before. There are possibilities of increased national efficiency, and even leadership, in the line of our special pursuits, which are too great to be sacrificed. We certainly have the opportunity now to take and hold a more important place for the American branch of our department of science than it has ever occupied. We have to include in our aim both speedy victory in the war and also permanent usefulness among the nations of the earth. This brings us again to the thought of what we can do to render less likely the recurrence of such a calamity as this war. It has been said over and over again, and with perfect truth, that the awful struggle which is now going on is largely the result of restricted vision and defective imagination. One thing that can help to correct the distorted perspective of a narrow nationalism is a more just view of human history; and the researches that result in giving some idea of its vast stretch and infinite variety, while contributing at the same time to a better understanding of human nature, will do their important part in promoting true international sympathy. The investigations fostered by this organization of ours are useful in just this way, leading as they do both to mutual comprehension and also to joint labor in a noble field of effort. There is a common possession of all the modern highly educated peoples which is unique and of priceless value. It is the written record of the mighty civilizations of the

ancient world, and of the thought and feeling of their great men. There are stores of poetry and philosophy, of anecdote and humor, of writings embodying those transforming ideas which seers have conceived and successive generations have perpetuated. We think especially of the Sacred Books of the East: The scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, the Vedas, the Avesta, the Koran, and the other religious classics of Asia and Egypt. All the branching roads of the higher learning of our day lead back to this common standing ground, where we and our fellows of other nations meet in a kind of scholarly alliance that has no true parallel elsewhere. The students and masters of philosophy, religion, history, literature, language, art, all coöperate here in a multitude of such researches as are normally free from any bearing on industries or commerce or colonization, nor even concerned with modern literary achievement; and are undertaken in a spirit of the most friendly collaboration and competition. Without this vast neutral field of mutual service, lying so largely in the ancient Orient, trodden by many generations of scholars and still inexhaustible, the world would be incomparably poorer and weaker. We have, in our day and according to the measure of our ability, the duty and privilege of aiding here.

Of course neither oriental studies nor any others will ever do away with national rivalry and jealousy. A time when the most humanizing of studies flourish may be a period in which peoples are industriously throttling one another; just as it is quite possible that an age of great inventions and industrial advancement should be one of small souls. We know only too well that a considerable amount of investigation of the lands and peoples of the East has been a part of the larger operation of preying upon them. We have seen in recent years a good many bulky volumes of oriental research brought into being by what might be called a gastronomic interest, as the scientist at the dinner table examines with satisfaction the chemical constituents of his morsel before swallowing it. Even so, the volume will do its good work, and the next generation, if Allah wills, will be less greedy. Unquestionably, the colonial administration of such countries as North Africa, Egypt, and India has been more considerate because of the popular and scholarly interest in the lands and their past history. Even the Turk has treated Pales-



tine and Syria very differently by reason of their archaeological and religious importance in the eyes of Western peoples.

I think it will hardly be denied, by those who investigate, that the atmosphere of oriental studies in the last two or three decades has not been favorable to a profound and sympathetic *interpretation* of Orientals and their work. Our modern nations have perhaps been so occupied with the thought of their own greatness that they have not been able to see and appreciate the greatness of the ancients. I am thinking of achievement as compared with opportunity, when I speak of this shortcoming in regard to sympathetic understanding. A great amount of new material has come to light, and scholarly research has made very important advance in many directions; but the main tendency of the time has been to keep to the surface rather than to go deep.

It has been a singularly barren time for Biblical interpretation of the first rank, for instance. The Old Testament scholarship of Europe, on which we were wont to rely, comes very near being negligible at present. Very few commentaries or other treatises of really large caliber have appeared in the present generation, and the most of the output has been of distinctly poor quality. In particular, the German exegesis, which has led the way for all the rest, has been decidedly anti-Semitic, with the result which can be imagined, though it has hardly been understood. In the domain of old Hebrew verse, where important progress has been made in comprehension of the external form, the interpretation of the content has stood at the very lowest ebb. We have been tortured by a long series of volumes written by men who have no feeling for poetry, and no patience with the unfortunate writers they are supposed to expound. It is refreshing to turn back to Herder's *Geist der hebräischen Poesie*, written in the 18th century. A somewhat similar judgment may justly be passed in regard to Mohammedan literature and history, and also (though less sweeping) concerning the principal religions and sacred writings of the remainder of the East. There has been a remarkable lack of such books as open a new door into the past, giving us a view which we feel to be true and know to be inspiring.

Judging from the literature which has recently appeared, our American scholars are quite as likely to meet this need of a

more profound and more sympathetic interpretation of the East as are those of any other country. What we have already contributed in this direction, in recent years, constitutes a very significant part of the total amount: in the History of Religions; Studies of Japan, China, India, and Persia; the life of Old Egypt and Babylonia; Hebrew history and literature; the art of various eastern lands. We cannot claim to have done our best, either in promoting a better understanding between Orient and Occident, or in creating in this country what is so much needed, a more lively and intelligent interest in Eastern peoples and problems. But we can take a justified though perhaps chastened satisfaction in saying to ourselves at this time—what it is less likely that anyone else will say for us—that the efforts we are making have proved their high value, and will count for even more in the near future. Whether we are primarily interested in the phenomena of speech, or in literature, or in the course of political history, we are all doing work which needs to be done here at home, and are preparing the way for an era of more effective collaboration with our colleagues abroad.

The peoples and lands of the Orient, and the various 'Eastern questions,' are surely coming into closer and closer contact with our national life, whether we desire it or not. Our country is already confronted with new responsibilities, some only half comprehended, while doubtless others are yet to arise. No one can predict what, or when, or how much; but this is certain, that we shall take a more active part than we ever have taken before in preserving the equilibrium of the world through real fellowship and coöperation with the nations of the East. We have all been startled by the relative magnitude and urgency of the oriental problems in the present war and in the preparations for it, and have come to see that under the existing conditions these problems were neither accidental nor avoidable. We have also learned that whether our own remoteness from it all was justified or not, it will neither be justified nor possible in the future. We are bound to gain a better understanding of the great nations of the far East, of the Balkan states (if any are left, after the war), of the various Mohammedan peoples. It belongs to this Oriental Society of ours to give more effective aid in this direction than it ever has given in the past. There are opportunities of spreading information and interest through

popular journals and magazines which we have not used to the full.

We American orientalists have always been at a great disadvantage, as compared with our colleagues of England, France, Holland, Germany, and other European countries, since we have no such close contact as they have with the Orient. The disadvantage will surely be lessened, as time goes on, but it will still continue; both because geographical position is a permanent thing, and also because the political relations of Europe with Asia and Africa will not be greatly modified in any time that we can foresee. We shall not have the encouragement of widespread popular interest produced by colonial administration and the resulting constant intercourse. Political interest, though somewhat quickened, will certainly not be keen. There is one point in our sphere of influence as orientalists, however, at which the foreign policy of our national government sorely needs a direct stimulus which we can help to give. We need to have much better prepared and better paid consuls in oriental lands. The time should come very soon when men will not be sent out to these important posts without a thorough training for the civil service, and an examination proving fitness for the special field of work. We ought to make our voice heard without delay in this demand, both as private individuals and also as a society. Incidentally, the reform would contribute appreciably to the prestige of our special studies.

The lack of any government aid in our more ambitious projects of research, that aid which has made possible such magnificent achievements in every principal European country, is one of the greatest handicaps under which we have suffered, and shall suffer. Subventions for purely scholarly undertakings in our field, contributions to the support of learned academies, provision for oriental museums and collections—these are all unheard-of in the budget of the United States Government, for reasons which should surprise no one, nor satisfy everybody. Until recently we have been without important museums or adequate libraries and dependent on the hospitality of Europe, to which a journey was necessary in order to get first-hand material. Now, thanks to the generosity of public-spirited men of wealth and the energy of individual scholars here and there, we are being provided with a part of what was needed, especially in the

great museums of New York and Boston, the Babylonian collections of Yale and the University of Pennsylvania, the oriental manuscripts of Yale, Princeton, Harvard, and Chicago, the Syrian antiquities at Princeton, and many smaller collections. Our library facilities have increased wonderfully, so that a multitude of scientific investigations can now be carried through in this country which could not possibly have been undertaken here only a short time ago. Treasures of oriental art, of the greatest importance, are also waiting to be studied.

But the most important feature of the present outlook for American oriental studies is undoubtedly this, that we are henceforth to be thrown on our own resources to a greater extent than ever before. We have always been very dependent on European scholars and publications, and especially on the Germans, who have supplied us with a large part of our textbooks and technical treatises. Some such dependence was necessary, in view of the meager facilities for publishing in this country and the comparatively small number of our own scholars. It made possible what otherwise would have been beyond our reach, but had of necessity its detrimental influence. We were deprived of the stimulus to production which comes from the necessity of making our own working tools. We needed only to take what was provided, and to give to original research the amount of time proportioned to our taste and opportunity. Something of independent judgment was also sacrificed, inasmuch as we found it possible to do without scientific reviews of our own, which would have been difficult to maintain, and consented to be more or less satisfied with the verdicts pronounced abroad.

The horizon has now been changed, by the war and its inevitable results. It is certain that in the years to come we shall not go on in just the same way as before. Our relations with German scholars and institutions have been interrupted most painfully, and by the time when they can be restored we shall have reached a standing ground new in some important respects. It is true, and we shall do our best to prove it true, that the world of scholars is the very last to admit harsh judgment of any of its members, or to cherish resentment against them; but the ominous fact remains, and cannot be minimized, that an ugly breach has been made and cannot soon be healed.

The interval that must elapse will be for us the unsought occasion of a step forward; it could hardly be otherwise, under the circumstances. Indeed, the first signs of new and important enterprises have already appeared, and others will certainly follow. We shall of course continue to be very largely dependent on European scholarship, using for the most part the same materials and helps that we have used in the past; any other expectation would be short-sighted and foolish, even if it were much more nearly possible of realization than is actually the case. But in the meantime our own work presents itself with a new urgency, and it is now incumbent upon us to make plans and begin to carry them out.

There are tasks requiring the coöperation of several or many scholars which we might very profitably undertake, such as collections of ancient texts and translations, works of lexicography, editions of manuscripts dealing with certain well defined subjects, a series of elementary grammars suited to the needs of our students, and the like. Some plans of this nature, as I have intimated, are already on foot. If the possible number of collaborators seems small—and it undeniably is, we must recollect that the work stirs up workmen, and that every such undertaking will provide a laboratory in which the best of our students can be trained. We should not expect, and perhaps should not desire, any large expansion of oriental studies in the United States; what we should aim at is greater vigor, better quality and more carefully coördinated effort. Any forced and unnatural growth in our field will do more harm than good. We may indeed experience a check, rather than encouragement, at the outset; for, as I said a moment ago, the temper of our compatriots is just now unfavorable to studies which do not seem to be ‘practical.’ It would not be surprising if the number of teaching positions in the various departments of our science should be decreased, for the time being. It may even be that for a short time the Orient itself will be more closed to us than it has been, and that first-hand material will be harder than ever to obtain. But we may be quite sure that these checks, if they come, will be only temporary.

In thus taking account of stock, on our anniversary, we are hardly likely to forget certain great and pressing needs which must be met in some way before our vision of a new scale of

effort can be fully realized. The most of such definite projects as I have mentioned as typical could be carried to completion with the materials and equipment which we already have at hand. But there are other activities, equally or more important, which we certainly must develop with the least possible delay, for which the means are now lacking, or inadequate, and must be supplied. It is imperative that we should have better facilities for publication, and considerable funds for the purpose. We need more and better fonts of oriental type for our books and journals. The establishment of an *Oriental Review* of the character which I attempted to sketch at the meeting of this Society a year ago is an urgent necessity, perhaps the most urgent of all. We can always count on private generosity when the cause is worthy, and in this case I have no doubt that a well considered effort would succeed. The attempt should certainly be made. Keeping our own standards high will be the surest way of gaining continued support from without. Greater care in awarding the Doctor's degree; greater efforts to keep the few very promising graduate students longer in the university, until they are really—and not merely nominally—prepared to take up creative work for themselves; greater care in recommending men for teaching positions; each endeavor of this kind will be richly repaid, and every case of neglect is a calamity for us all, seeing that we are so few in number.

There are doubtless possibilities of coöperation with oriental work and workers in this country, including both private individuals and public institutions, which we have not yet tried but might profitably investigate. There are many, not members of this Society, who are in close touch with the East, whose active sympathy we might be able to enlist from time to time, in one way and another. There are dealers in antiquities, in New York City and other cities, through whose hands are constantly passing objects of great historic and other scientific interest which are more likely than not to remain for some time to come unknown to any competent orientalist. I have myself several times happened, by the merest chance, to come across valuable inscribed monuments, some of which had already been sold and were in private houses. It might be feasible to form a committee of some sort, to keep watch of the antiquity market in our principal cities and report, preferably to the Editors of our Journal, in

order that at least some record may be kept. Our great museums now send out periodic bulletins announcing their most recent acquisitions. Could not the department entitled 'Brief Notes,' so successfully inaugurated in the *Journal* of our Society, be made to include a gleanings from these bulletins whenever they contain material of special importance to orientalists? We shall do well to keep in closer touch with missionaries in active service in the Orient, when this again becomes possible. We remember with pride the important contributions to science made through the medium of our *Journal* and elsewhere by Eli Smith, Cornelius Van Dyck, Justin Perkins, David Stoddard, Lewis Grout, and others, and the inspiration received from them by the home members of our Society in its early years.

A new proposal looking toward closer coöperation with oriental societies abroad has just been presented to us by the President of the *Société Asiatique*, and will be acted upon at this meeting. It is needless to say that we shall give hearty welcome to every opportunity of joining forces in more effective effort. We can see now more plainly than ever before how desirable is every such approach to a better understanding. Whatever provision we decide to make for the near future, let us conceive in the broadest spirit the idea of a closer union of orientalists, hoping for the day when it may become possible to include in it also those from whom we are now estranged. May the next twenty-five years of the life of this Society bring us to a milestone marking a station of greater usefulness, the world over, for these most cosmopolitan studies, and of even greater achievement on our own part than we have dared to think possible!